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THE
Battle of the Boats:

A TRANSLATION
OF
A NEWLY DISCOVERED GREEK PLAY.

BY

ADVERTISEMENT.

This Play, lately found, is supposed to be of about
the date of Sophocles, and contains much
valuable information about boat
racing as practised by young
Greek Students.

OXFORD :
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The Battle of the Boats.

A TRANSLATION.

OXFORD:

T. & G. SHRIMPTON, BROAD-STREET.

M. add. 109. c. 95. Digitized by Google



Translator's Note.

THE Play of which the following translation is now for the first time offered to the public, bears all the internal marks of genuine Greek Tragedy, and has been assigned by the best critics to some Author subsequent to Sophocles. Imitations of that great Poet are numerous throughout the "Battle of the Boats," and in it is contained much valuable information bearing on ancient boat-racing. My own idea is that Sophocles had the inestimable advantage of having read this Play, as there is more genius and less finish in this than in any of those of Sophocles; but had it been written later, the contrary would probably have been the case.

The argument is as follows : Two Trieremes are about to race, the one endeavouring to catch (*βουμπεῖν*) the other, to which a start is given. The crew of the second boat is in great distress, caused by the contumacy of one of the rowers. The Trierarch, lamenting with the Pilot, in despair refuses to take part in the race, and takes to drinking instead. A prophet adds his voice to the gloom of the drama, and a messenger coming to announce the result of the race, begins by narrating an accident that occurred at the start, upon which the Trierarch rushes out, apparently to self-destruction; and it is only after his departure that the ultimate success of his boat is announced.

Dramatis Personæ.

Kaptán,		A Trierach.
Koxun,		His Pilot.
Number Ten,		A Recalcitrant Oar.
	Prophet, (Sporting.)	
Messenger.		Chorus of Young Men.



The Battle of the Boats.

- KAPT.** My own dear brother in the boating set¹,
Dost thou not know how that of all the woes
Which persecute a wretched Trierarch,
What is there left which all-subduing fate
Will not accomplish on us two to day,
The last survivors of our last year's crew ?
- Kox.** Ah me ! what new thing bringing hast thou come ?
Tell me, if this at least is to be told.
- KAPT.** But for the evils of thy friends affect thee nought,
Thou hast not heard the god-attested vow 10
That number ten of the third bench has sworn—
No more to train, nor raw beefsteaks to eat²,

¹ L. 1. A beautiful opening, evidently suggested by the opening dialogue of Soph. Ant. : or could Sophocles have copied this, as conjectured by some ?

² L. 12. Apparently some cruel atrocities practised as sacrificial rites propitiatory of the river god.

Nor to abjure the cloud-compelling weed³ ;
 While number five has badly sprained his wrist,
 And cannot hold his oar ; Ah woe is me,
 Fate is inscrutable, and we shall lose our race !

KOX. Shall we then escape notice having taken off⁴ ?

KAPT. But for to yield brings more disgrace on men
 Than to fail fighting,—let us take our chance.

CHOR. Foolish is he who wrestleth with Fate. 20

KAPT. Will you not then with objurgating prayers
 Try to persuade the infatuated ass,
 While I to appease the jealous river-god
 Go clothe myself in sacred flannel garb⁵ ?

CHOR. My friend, if one may gain reply to this,
 Though long the task and painful, I would know
 From you the cause of all those coursing drops
 That chase each other down your countenance ?

KOX. Ask not ! I fear to tell, nor will you joy to hear.

CHOR. Partly, for I myself being not senseless 30
 Feel that the day is warm, I understand,—
 But woe is in your looks, and anger keen
 Bursts from your lips when you address the crew,
 And something dread must be the cause, methinks.

KOX. The story of my grief were long to tell,
 And I have little time to linger here
 But since you wish it I will tell you all.

CHOR. By telling it one's sorrow is relieved.

³ L. 13. Some herb chewed which caused the chewer to vomit smoke, I conjecture, but compare lines 70, 72.

⁴ L. 17. An obscure passage, I have translated it literally, but it defies explanation.

⁵ L. 24. More of the barbarous propitiation, comp. line 12.

Kox. I had a grandmother in days gone by⁶,
 And oft have heard that dame respectable 40
 Telling the wisdom of antiquity
 In ancient saws and legends full of truth,
 She told me once as I remember it
 How an old woman dwelling in a shoe⁷
 (For poverty, my friends, is a stern power :)
 Had progeny so numerous, poor soul,
 That what to do with them she could not know,
 Most like to her I now appear to be,
 For I am in a strait, and turning oft
 This way and that, cannot provide escape. 50
 My father's sire was in his youthful days
 Extremely short, his offspring shorter still,
 Who now is fat and cannot jump or run,—
 I, as you see not fat, but very thin,
 By fate some three years back came joyously,
 Leaving the village where my grandfather,
 And after him my father, owns broad lands,—
 To seek the praise of skilful pilotage,
 Which both my sires had won before my time.
 Success and Luck attendant on my skill 60
 Sat one on either of the rudder lines
 As often as I steered our well-rowed ship,
 But now the heroes of past years are gone
 And we two only are remaining here,

⁶ L. 39. This lengthy speech is rather more in the style of Euripides than Sophocles, but the opening speech of Deianira (Soph. Trach. 1.) is very like it in manner and design. A close inspection of this play makes me suspect plagiarism somewhere.

⁷ L. 44. This story does not occur elsewhere in Grecian literature, it seems to be nearly connected with a tale in modern legendary lore.

I and my friend who left but now in sorrow
 Kaptân, whom all men call renowned as stroke⁸:—
 Much have we toiled, no little trouble given,
 In choice of sons of heroes for our crew,
 But number ten derides and mocks our pains,
 Smokes and drinks hard, and any thing but
 trains⁹. 70

But stay, I see him yonder coming in ;
 Methinks, too, smoke is issuing from his mouth¹⁰ !
 Ah, woe is me ! I must avoid the sight !

CHOR. Nay, rather go and try Persuasion's power !

KOX. I will ; and thus I steel my wrathful heart,
 Thinking on former triumphs and success.

SEMI-CHORUS. Shall we go or shall we stay,
 There is safe to be a row
 When they hear what each will say ?

SEMI-CHORUS. Koxun's speaking to him now, 80
 He appears to turn away,
 Anger reddens on his brow,—

CHOR. Let us stay !

No, for they come ! away, away¹¹ !

KOX. Alas ! what is the use of sense to you¹²,
 I know full well you've coolly broken through
 The laws which I am here to institute.

⁸ L. 66. Comp. Soph. O. T. 8.

⁹ L. 70. This is very obscure, perhaps the MS. is faulty.

¹⁰ L. 72. See line 13 and note.

¹¹ L. 83. The Chorus, fearful of the power of No. 10's anger, suggests retirement, that it should quite leave the stage would be unprecedented, and indeed we find it speaking at line 99.

¹² L. 84. This dialogue in many points resembles Soph. O. T. 316, et seqq.

No. 10. What is the matter, you seem out of sorts ?

Kox. I scarce can speak, I cannot tell my grief,
Or I shall show your shame in telling it. 90

No. 10. I say, young fellow, if you swear at me,
Grieving you soon shall learn to know your betters.

Kox. Were you but smaller I would call you ' fool ' ¹³.

No. 10. And so I am for listening to you.

Kox. Ah ! he has gone, and all that I could say
Unheeded passed right through his brainless skull ;
Yet he *will* row, and I must go, ah me !
To tell our Kaptân of his stubbornness.

CHOR. Oft have I heard, I may add also, seen,—
How Luck is the Ruler of all, 100
Strength of arm and even skill
Luck can beat, and often will,
That is the aid that I call :
Luck ! help me to do something mean !
An [augur] I shouldn't much mind ¹⁴,
If that be a shape you'll endure ¹⁵,
And I don't think the next boat would find
That then they could feel quite so sure :—

¹³ L. 93. V. Ant. 755.

¹⁴ L. 105. *Αὐγύρ* is certainly the MS. word, but it can scarcely mean a prophet, unless a *bore* is meant, (when the word might be used *per metaph.*) by whom the enemies' boat might be retarded. A variation in the accent would give *Αὐγερ*, a kind of gimlet.

¹⁵ L. 106. I have translated *τολμᾶν* *endure* (comp. *ἔτλα καὶ Δανάη.*) but a better rendering, were it not for the rhyme, would be *endue*, as connecting the word with the root *τολ*, found in Latin *tollo*, *tuli*, etc., which might well mean 'wear.'

- Or if as a damsel on shore,
 You would dazzle their pilot his eyes ¹⁶, 110
 I shouldn't bewail any more,
 For then we should carry the prize ¹⁷ :—
 Or if as I've known you at times
 You would come as an opportune knave ¹⁸,
 In a punt or a barge, from all crimes
 Your worshippers here you would save.
 Aid, protect us,
 Guide, direct us,
 Luck, thy assistance we crave !
- STROPHE. Sacred Luck ! in this our race 120
 Hither turn propitious face,
 Look on thy trembling servants here,
 Drive far away all chilling fear,
 Something dread my mind presages !
- ANTI-STROPHE. Shuddering here before thee, me
 Thy suppliant, O river, see !
 Send thy nymphs with dear commands
 To guide our boat with tender hands,
 Vows and thanks shall be their wages !
- EPODOS. Listen ! Listen ! we implore thee, 130
 Standing here in prayer before thee ;—
 Yet, for I see, with downcast face ¹⁹
 Our trierarch comes with mourner's pace,

¹⁶ L. 110. I have endeavoured to retain an archaism, that the original shows here.

¹⁷ L. 112. 'Carry the prize,' *φέρειν ἄθλον* subaud. *νίκης*.

¹⁸ L. 114. Very doubtful,—Knave seems to be used per metaphor : from some game of chance. Punt and Barge are words I have reproduced, not being able to comprehend or translate the original.

¹⁹ L. 132-5. Comp. Soph. Trach. 227 et seqq.

Peace ! let us hear his voice,—

Rejoice ! if what you bring, sir, should make one
rejoice.

Kox. Thee, thee I say, who bendest tow'rds the earth ²⁰
Thy face, dost still refuse to give us hope ?

KAPT. For such a mutiny was buzzed about my ears,
My better judgment was obscured by boding fears ;
Disabled is the best oar of the entire crew, 140
And all the rules of training have been broken ²¹
through,

And yet the boat would not take off and fly disgrace,
So to improve their plight I have resigned my place !

Kox. Oh ! Oh ! Ah ! Ah ! ototototot da ²² !

CHOR. Wise man ! Wiser plan,

Ere the race began,

To retire

To avoid defeat,

If your boat be beat,

No desire

150

Or regret of glory lost

Will affect your mind ;

If you win, you'll make a boast

Of the place you have resigned.

Kox. Well, I admire, and yet I don't admire

This pluckless pluck that robs us of your aid ²³,

²⁰ L. 136. Comp. Soph. Ant. 441.

²¹ L. 141. See Note on line 12, and comp. 24. 70, etc.

²² L. 143. Hopeless of rendering the *simple* and *plaintive* interjections of Greek into adequate English, I have printed them as they are in the MS.

²³ L. 155. A bold oxymoron.

I envy you ; but dare not imitate ²⁴,
 For I cannot act thus dishonourably,
 Nor is my nature one to set itself
 Against the wishes of our eager crew ; 160
 I go to steer—

You stay for beer,
 And feel no fear—at what you do.

KAPT. Farewell ! may you have joy in victory.
 My friends, what shall I do ? I wish them joy,
 But know too surely that it is in vain—
 I have a stern resolve, I'll go and drink
 A cup to every letter of each name,
 And curse with bitter hate our enemies.
 Papai papai, oh ! ah ²⁵ !

CHOR. Bacchus, god of festive mirth, 170
 While I muse on thy gift
 Shed in bounty o'er the earth,
 Crowding thoughts come pressing swift ;
 Thou canst calm the troubled breast,
 Give or cure an aching head,
 Thou canst give the weary rest,
 Making e'en the road his bed ²⁶ !

²⁴ L. 156. Ismene's refusal to imitate Antigone's heroism, Ant. 78.—
 κ.τ.λ. seems copied from this— O Sophocles, quousque tandem !

²⁵ L. 169. See note on line 143. Here surely an inferior genius to the author would have felt that he was entangled in a *dignus vindice nodus*, and have introduced a deity, as Sophocles himself in the Philoctetes ; but no ! the play proceeds smoothly to a most dramatic conclusion.

²⁶ L. 177. It would seem that the votaries of Bacchus were not unfrequently in the habit of sleeping in the streets : it is to this devotional custom that the Chorus is alluding.

Show as thou wert wont to show
 All thy power, now seldom seen,
 Bless thy worshippers below 180
 With a visit to this scene ;
 Bassareus, approach more near ²⁷ !
 Strengthen all thy votaries here
 With the hope of bottled beer
 Their souls to cheer.
 Stay, for I see a prophet come along,
 A man irreverend, always telling wrong
 What wont befall, let's hear his words, my friends !
 PROPHET. Many bad, few good, I have seen ; I have known ²⁸
 None worse than this boat of yours, my friends, 190
 But I confess your enemies alone
 Could equal you in badness : see how it ends ²⁹ !
 One of the two,—listen to my prophecy,
 Will be winner, or very nigh.
 CHOR. Are you sure ? Do you think ³⁰
 That the two will not both sink ?

²⁷ L. 182. Conf. Horace Od. I. xviii. ii. "Non ego te candide Bassareu," where "candide" appears to be equivalent to "pallide," as we say, *Bass's Pale Ale*. The idea that beer was known to the ancient Olympians is confirmed by a modern poet,—

"Bring it, quoth the cloud compeller,
 And the wine god brought the *beer*." Bon Gaultier, p. 229.

²⁸ L. 189. The character of this prophet seems to be drawn from life, (? Bell's *Life P.D.*) This language seems drawn from a popular *libellus* of the period whose writers used obscure diction, bad rhymes, and worse metres.

²⁹ L. 192. Conf. Soph. Trach 2, and Herod I. xxxii. ad fin. Solon's maxim, τέλος ὁπάων, is here quoted by the Prophet.

³⁰ L. 195. The Chorus has been ironical throughout, and seems to be scoffing here.

PROPHET. Don't interrupt the words of fate—

I said, I prophesied of late

That one would win,—I meant, if either did

It would not be the other ;

200

Back not the loser ! keep it dark !

MES. Where is he who, with ill-omened anger, and in a³¹ rage, denied that he would row, and said not that he would ever again put hand to oar ? Hast thou seen him, my friends, and will you give me of the beer-cup for the news that I am come bringing ?

CHOR. The man indeed has gone out imprecating curses, and now yonder he is returning, having liquored up.

MES. I indeed, having run fast so that none should anticipate me, held much revolving thought in my mind, whether at all to come before thee, or 210 to return again, leaving my news untold. And now I will tell thee, having learned this first, that thou wilt not again be enraged, for the bearer of news is not a man to be reviled, whatever news he brings.

PROPHET. The race then ended as I said it would !

KAPT. You take good care, at any rate, and fence yourself round from fear of harm : but will you not say what you come announcing ; and then take yourself off with all speed ?

³¹ L. 202. The trammels of verse would not allow free play for the vigorous account given by the messenger, who is much like those of Sophocles generally, and as his verse is execrable in the original, I have ventured to prefer a prose rendering, keeping it as literal as possible.

MES. I indeed was standing whence the boats should³² start, and I saw a horrid sight, fearful to tell; for No. 10 came, having drunk over much beer, and with the forbidden weed in his impious mouth. Then with many imprecations the crew³³ 220 reviled one another, rower accusing rower, and evil words flew between. And at the last, when the signal resounded, they were trying to start, but fate intervened between the oar and the water, and three rowers fell back from their benches, and then, alas, loud shouts resounded from the shore, and groans arose under the sky,—then

KAPT. Phew! phew! Then have we lost the race, and as for me I will go and sacrifice to Bacchus, pouring copious libations. Heigho! oh! ah!

MES. The man indeed is gone away grieved, having broken into my words, and is, as one may guess, on a razor-edge of chance.

CHOR. What, hast thou more to tell?

MES. Ay, thou knowest.

CHOR. Nay, but tell me?

MES. But thou hast heard—

CHOR. What? for I do not understand.

MES. Shouting as of

CHOR. Those who defeated us?

³² L. 218. "Whence . . . should start," V. Trach 701.

³³ L. 220. "*Nec queros coram populo Medea tradicet*:" the narration of these horrors is quite in harmony with the purest taste of ancient tragedy. The *præsens facundia* of the messenger presents a vivid picture, that would have satisfied the impressionable Greek mind thoroughly.

MES. Nay, for the Trireme before us

CHOR. Did what ? for I am anxious to hear.

MES. Was steered into
the bank at the start, by the all-careless pilot.

CHOR. Did we then overtake
them, so as to bump them, having been caught ?

MES. For the
god of luck and of strong beer was on our side.

PROPHET. This news, my friends, I meant to tell you long
Before the boats were starting for the race.

CHOR. Deities of wine and beer,
Gods of luck, on you I call,
Hear, receive, your votaries' cheer
As we shout for our boat's crew one and all !
Hurrah ! hurrah ! with one cheer more
We'll all get drunk together !
Hurrah ! hurrah ! for the vows we swore
Must be kept in beer now or never !
No more beefsteaks raw, ceased is training's law,
Their pilot's commands they are scorning ;
All their bets will be paid,
For the bump they have made,
And—they wont go home till morning !



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